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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 04/22/08

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ARTICLES:

(1) Government plans to abolish counselor system in MOD reform, establish advisory posts

SANKEI (Page 5) (Abridged slightly)  
April 22, 2008

In an envisaged reform of the Ministry of Defense (MOD), the government decided yesterday to abolish the counselor (sanjikan) system, which has been in place since the Defense Agency, the MOD's predecessor, was established in 1954, and establish instead advisory posts to be filled by political appointees for the defense minister. The government will also consider adding MOD to the list of four government offices -- the Finance Ministry; Foreign Ministry; Economy, Trade, and Industry Ministry; and National Police Agency -- that have seconded their personnel as secretaries to the prime minister. Counselors assisting the defense minister have been selected only from among MOD officials. The government has judged that MOD's exclusive nature led to its slow responses to a bribery scandal involving a former vice-defense minister and the recent collision of an Aegis-equipped destroyer with a fishing boat. The government aims to improve MOD's nature by introducing the advisor system to appoint civilians with the aim of enhancing the functions of personnel assisting the defense minister.

In the wake of a series of MOD scandals, Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba has come up with a private MOD reform plan to: (1) appoint civilians as defense counselors, and (2) integrate the MOD's internal bureaus and the Self-Defense Forces' staff offices into a single body. He plans to put together a reform plan in June based on the position of the Council on Reform of the Defense Ministry at the

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Prime Minister's Office.

The abolition of the counselor system and the appointment of a prime ministerial secretary from MOD are expected to make a set of proposals to be produced by the LDP's MOD reform subcommittee. At this point when Ishiba's plan is being strongly criticized as too radical, the government intends to realize those steps by incorporating them in the LDP's proposals.

The counselor system originates from the creation of counselor posts at the time of the establishment of the Defense Agency. Although the name has been changed to defense counselor as a result of the central government reform in January 2001, there have been no major changes to the system. Placed directly under the defense minister, the defense counselors are tasked with aiding the defense minister in the ministry's overall policies. There are nine defense counselors, including six internal bureau directors general. As seen in the fact that some counselors did not come up to MOD in the wake of the Aegis accident, the initial purpose of providing the defense minister with cross-sectional assistance has not been served.

The newly planned advisory posts will be filled by political appointees, including private-sector individuals. The defense minister will appoint them after the maximum number of advisors is set by a law. The appointment of retired government officials will not be ruled out. After nailing down details, the government plans to submit a bill amending the Defense Ministry Establishment Law to next year's regular Diet session along with other MOD restructuring plans.

Meanwhile, Ishiba is exploring ways to integrate and restructure the MOD internal bureaus and the staff offices of the three SDF branches. The LDP, on the other hand, is considering setting up only a joint command composed of SDF officers and MOD bureaucrats under the Joint Staff Office. Ironing out differences in reform plans is expected to face difficulties.

(2) Before Upper House committee, Nihi reveals U.S. military aircraft's low-altitude flight in violation of Japan-U.S. agreement

AKAHATA (Page 2) (Full)

April 19, 2008

Before the House of Councillors Audit Committee on April 18, Japanese Communist Party member Sohei Nihi criticized U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ) by producing data showing a U.S. military aircraft's low-altitude flight over Hiroshima City (last December) in violation of the (1999) Japan-U.S. agreement to abide by Japan's Aviation Law.

In its (January 11) written reply to Nihi's question, the government made it clear that the U.S. military aircraft flew over the city last December at an altitude of approximately 450 meters.

The Aviation Law defines 300 meters above the highest obstacle as the minimum safe altitude. The 1999 Japan-U.S. agreement reads: "U.S. Forces Japan shall use the minimum safe altitude specified in the Aviation Law."

Nihi produced a piece of paper showing the U.S. military aircraft's estimated low-altitude flight over the Atomic Bomb Dome and other

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spots in Hiroshima, produced based on surveys conducted by a local civic group.

Indicating that a witness in the on-site survey said that the U.S. aircraft had flown lower than the 397-meter Mt. Gongen, Nihi said: "Unless the aircraft flew over 300 meters higher than Mt. Gongen, we cannot say that it observed the minimum safe altitude."

Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura replied: "An administrative official explained to me that the U.S. aircraft had not violated the Japan-U.S. agreement. But as I (listened to) Mr. Nihi's explanation, I felt there is a variance with the facts." Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba also said: "I, too, have experienced low-altitude flights. They are terrifying."

Nihi urged the U.S. side to stop low-altitude flights and called for major revisions to the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement.

(3) Local governments dissatisfied at early morning departure of F-15s, with representative grumbling: "U.S. military is making light of residents"

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 23) (Full)  
April 22, 2008

"Despite our repeated protests and requests, the U.S. military has done the same things." "We wonder why they can't take off in the daytime." The U.S. military yesterday notified the local governments hosting the U.S. Kadena Air Base of the early morning departure of F-15 fighter jets for the first time in about six months, sparking dissatisfaction among the local governments. The assemblies of Kadena Town and Chatan Town will hold meetings of their Special Committees on Military Bases today and tomorrow, respectively. Okinawa Mayor Mitsuko Tomon grumbled: "We have repeatedly asked (the U.S. military) to drop the plan, but it is regrettable to hear that the plan will be carried out as scheduled." She added: "Since it (early morning departure) will pose a health risk and give anxiety to the local residents, we cannot approve it. The U.S. military should be fully aware that an early morning departure will be a burden on the residents."

Kadena Town Mayor Tokujitsu Miyagi said: "No matter what reasons the U.S. military may give, we will continue to call for daytime departures." He expressed dissatisfaction at early morning or late night takeoffs in behalf of the local residents.

Koei Tanaka, chairman of the Kadena Town Assembly's Special Committee on Military Bases, said: "The U.S. military may continue early departures for training even after the Iron Flow program is completed." He added: "The citizens' right to live in a quiet environment must be protected without fail."

Masaharu Teruya, chairman of the Chatan Assembly's Special Committee on Military Bases, assailed: "We have called on the U.S. military

time and again to cancel the plan. They should avoid early morning takeoffs. Although they cite operational necessity, the residents cannot be convinced of the U.S. military's unilateral proceeding."

Katsue Yonamine, chairman of the Special Committee on Military Bases of the Okinawa Assembly, deplored: "Our assembly adopted a resolution of protest and asked the U.S. military to call off the plan. But they rejected our request. Such a stance indicates that

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the U.S. military is making light of the residents."

(4) Three municipal assemblies opposing early morning departure of F-15s tomorrow

OKINAWA TIMES (Page 2) (Full)  
April 22, 2008

Three U.S. F-15 fighter jets and several air tankers are scheduled to leave the U.S. Kadena Air Base for the United States early tomorrow morning. The assemblies of Okinawa City, Kadena Town, and Chatan Town, which are adjacent to the base, are strongly objecting the early morning departure.

The Chatan assembly (chaired by Tomotsune Miyazato) decided in a meeting of the Special Committee on Military Bases (chaired by Masaharu Teruya) yesterday morning to submit a resolution of protest calling for canceling the plan and a petition to the committee in its extraordinary session. The assembly will hold another meeting tomorrow to determine what wording should be used for the two papers and when the extraordinary meeting should be held.

Teruya said: "If the aircraft fly as scheduled, the assembly will submit a resolution of protest calling for canceling early departures. If the plan is postponed, we will continue to protest as long as the early morning departures are scheduled.

The Kadena assembly (chaired by Masayoshi Irei) will hold a meeting this morning of its Special Committee on Military Bases to confer on measures to deal with the early morning departures of aircraft. The committee's chairman, Koei Tanaka, emphasized: "We cannot approve the early morning takeoffs which will disturb residents' sleep. The U.S. military may also have early departure plans in the future for training in the U.S. and the like. It is necessary for the assembly to show its stance."

Katsue Yonamine, chairman of the Special Committee on Military Bases of the Okinawa assembly, said in a rage: "Despite our repeated protest, the U.S. military plans to implement the plan. It is outrageous." He added: "I hear that they have decided to postpone the plan due to the malfunction of an air tanker. If that is the case, I'm even more concerned." Yonamine has expressed a desire to discuss with other committee members tomorrow a plan on holding a meeting.

(5) Japan, South Korea agree to start preliminary EPA talks; Challenges ahead; Gulf over lowering tariffs

NIKKEI (Page 4) (Full)  
April 22, 2008

With a view to resuming Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) talks, Japan and South Korea during the bilateral summit on April 21 agreed to launch working-level preliminary talks in June. However, there is a significant difference in the two countries' stances toward the trade pact, with South Korea aiming to cut its trade deficits with Japan while Japan likely to be forced to defend its agricultural sector. Chances are that the envisaged talks may encounter complications right from the beginning. To what extent the planned talks can make headway is unclear, because some in both countries have an underlying thought that is cautious about signing such an agreement.

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The Japan-South Korea EPA talks have been suspended since November 12, 2004. However, when Fukuda visited South Korea in February this year, the two leaders agreed to look into resuming the talks. One Japanese government source gave a high score to the outcome of the summit this time, noting, "The issue has taken a step forward with the two leaders clearly indicating June as a time to start talks."

However, the future of the talks is fraught with many difficulties. According to trade statistics compiled by the Finance Ministry, South Korea's trade deficit with Japan stood at about 3 trillion yen in 2007. It imports liquid crystal- and semi-conductor-related parts from Japan, assembles them into such products as cellphones and exports them. South Korean President Lee Myung Bak has stated his determination to cut his country's trade deficit with Japan. However, he is caught on the horns of a dilemma that if South Korea decreases imports from Japan, its exports to the world would also drop.

South Korea insisted on the wording "working-level talks" for the joint press release this time. South Korea has taken this strategy with its public opinion toward Japan in mind. The likelihood is that the talks will be slow going.

Sources familiar with Japan-South Korea relations say Fukuda and Lee did not discuss an EPA at all. A Japanese government official during lead-up talks had pointed out, "Once the EPA talks are resumed, it would be possible for Japan to look into the possibility of extending technological cooperation in the parts and materials areas." However, the two countries remained at odds with the South Korean government insisting that technological cooperation should come first. The summit reportedly ended with Fukuda and Lee reading out a text they had separately prepared.

It is true that Japan and South Korea can hardly give way to each other on some items in their tariff-lowering negotiations. For instance, auto market liberalization may not benefit South Korean automakers, according to a source related to Nippon Keidanren. Abolishing tariffs on tuna Japan imports from South Korea could affect its fishing industry.

Expansion of investment in South Korea by Japan holds the key to solving this issue. Talks among business leaders will carry a special weight in paving the way for that. Nippon Keidanren Chairman Fujio Mitarai during a regular press conference on Apr. 21 pointed out, "If the South Korean market is attractive, investment in that country by Japanese companies would increase." Japanese and South Korean business circles' down-to-earth effort to create attractive conditions for investment will likely become the focal point in resuming EPA talks between the two countries.

(6) Editorial: Japan, South Korea must build new era for future-oriented ties

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
April 28, 2008

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and South Korean President Lee Myung Bak, who visited Japan for the first time after taking office in late February, agreed in their summit to further improve bilateral relations and work together to build a matured partnership to bring the bilateral ties into a "new era." We welcome President Lee's

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stance of stressing the importance of building future-oriented bilateral ties. He stated: "We should not let the past prevent us from going toward the future."

Japan and South Korea had long suspended their top leaders' mutual visits due to the strained ties between the two countries over historical perception while President Roh Moo Hyun was in office. Tokyo and Seoul cooled down in the political area. This also had something to do with the suspension of negotiations on an economic partnership agreement (EPA) since November 2004.

The annual number of Japanese and South Korean visitors to each

other's country now reaches nearly 5 million. The two nations have a far better understanding of each other through their fans for each other's culture. Annual trade between Japan and South Korea totals more than 80 billion dollars. Japan is South Korea's third largest trade partner, and South Korea is also Japan's third largest trade partner. We can say that the lack of mutual trust in the political area has hamstrung the two countries in strengthening their ties.

We welcome the two countries' embarkation on building a new era for them through their leaders.

There is also a matter of concern. In the past, South Korean administrations upheld their stance of strengthening bilateral ties upon their inauguration. Later on, however, they changed their policies. The term of South Korea's president is five years. When the president's popularity drops, anti-Japanese sentiments and historical issues might be used to boost the administration's popularity.

What should Tokyo and Seoul do to build steadfast ties? It is essential to translate bilateral agreements into action before anything else.

The two leaders agreed to begin working-level talks in June on resuming negotiations for an EPA. They also agreed to cooperate closely to denuclearize North Korea and resolve the abduction issue in collaboration with the United States.

There is a cautious view in South Korea about entering into an EPA. Although trade between the two countries has expanded, South Korea's trade deficit marked a record high of about 30 billion dollars last year. Japanese-made materials and parts are used for many South Korean exports, including liquid crystal panels. There is a structural problem. The more trade grows, the more South Korea's trade deficit with Japan increases. An EPA might expand further the trade imbalance.

Correcting the trade imbalance is a vital issue for President Lee, who places top priority on "pragmatic economy." The question is whether Tokyo and Seoul can promote negotiations on an EPA that will lead to mutual benefits, including investment in South Korea by Japanese material and parts industries. To prevent the Lee administration from becoming anti-Japanese, efforts by both countries will be required.

(7) Editorial: We welcome South Korean President Lee's decision to strengthen Japan-U.S.-ROK cooperation

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
April 20, 2008

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South Korean President Lee Myung Bak will arrive in Japan today. The president will stop over in Tokyo on his way home from the United States, his first overseas trip since he took office. President Lee, who has a business background, will make a quick two-day trip to Japan. Although successive South Korean presidents have taken a hard line in dealing with Japan, the Lee administration will likely carry out pragmatic diplomacy.

When former South Korean presidents visited Japan for the first time, they never forgot to take up the issues of past history in their summits with Japanese leaders. Their purposes were to call Japan to offer an apology and engage in self-reflection, and successive Japanese prime ministers were displeased at being told to do so.

This was a sort of a "rite of passage" for Japanese and South Korean diplomacy, but the upcoming presidential Japan visit appears to be different. The Lee administration takes a policy of attaching more priority to pragmatism than to philosophy, without dwelling on formalities. The administration also places more importance on future-oriented ties than on historical issues. We hope this policy will be maintained and that future-oriented bilateral relations will be built.

The main purpose of President Lee's overseas travel is to rebuild relations of trust with the United States and Japan, as well as the traditional cooperative relations among Japan, the United States and South Korea. President Lee aims to carve out a future for his country based on trilateral cooperation while replacing the foreign policy of the former Roh Moo Hyun government, which took a tough stance (against Japan and the U.S.).

Japan and South Korea share such difficult international issues as North Korea's nuclear programs and China's rise. It is greatly welcomed that South Korea has returned to the trilateral cooperative framework. Japan, which faces the issue of North Korea's abductions of Japanese nationals, is especially encouraged by the Lee government's strong interest in the abduction issue.

President Lee has promised the people of his country economic development. Naturally, he has high expectations of Japan.

For example, South Korea has its largest trade deficit with Japan, a sum reaching 30 billion dollars per year. South Korea will have to improve the trade balance. South Korea, a huge exporter, relies on a large amount of imports of parts and materials from Japan. It means that South Korea is a good customer.

Are there any ways for the two countries to cooperate in such industries as parts and materials? Japan intends to find ways to seek mutual benefits while giving more consideration to South Korea. To that end, we want to see new cooperative relations with an eye on the conclusion of a Japan-South Korea free trade agreement (FTA).

(8) Prime Minister Fukuda to Chinese foreign minister: Face up to reality

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)  
April 19, 2008

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda met on April 18 with visiting Chinese

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Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi at the Prime Minister's Office. Yang, referring to the riots in Tibet, said: "I would like you to understand the nature of the group led by the Dalai Lama." In response, Fukuda urged the Chinese government to make efforts to resolve the issue, saying:

"It is necessary to face up to the reality that the riots in Tibet have become an international issue. We should prevent the issue from having a negative impact on the Beijing Olympics."

Yang stressed China's assertion that the Dalai Lama was responsible for the riots, noting: "If the Dalai Lama's side stops their independence activities, violence, and efforts to ruin the Beijing Olympics, the door for dialogue will open."

Fukuda told Yang that Japan was ready to cooperate with China on global warming as much as possible, saying: "It is necessary to create a framework in which all countries in the world can take part. China's participation is vital." Yang said that China would make a contribution to the success of the Group of Eight (G-8) summit in July in Hokkaido, in which China would take part.

Meanwhile, Fukuda and Yang agreed to continue efforts to resolve the dispute over gas exploration rights in the East China Sea.

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa and other DPJ officials met with Yang the same day. Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama and Vice President Seiji Maehara gave Yang a warning, saying: "We are concerned about the riots in Tibet from the standpoint of human rights. We want you to take the international community's criticism into consideration." Hatoyama and Maehara also took up the row over poisoned China-made dumplings and the issue of gas exploration in the East China Sea, and told Yang: "We hope for an early response from the Chinese government."

Speaking of the riots in Tibet, Yang sharply asserted:

"It is China's internal issue. The Dalai Lama faction has been trying to split our country and hamper the Beijing Olympics. If they end these moves, we will hold dialogue. As long as there is no change in the situation, the (Chinese government) will have to step up public order."

In his meeting with Social Democratic Party head Mizuho Fukushima, Yang gave his outlook on the issue of North Korea's nuclear ambitions, saying:

"There was positive improvement owing to the recent negotiations between the United States and North Korea. The United States may remove North Korea from its list of states sponsoring terrorism."

(9) Poll on lowering legal age of adulthood

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
April 20, 2008

Questions & Answers  
(Figures shown in percentage)

Q: The Civil Code sets the age of adulthood at 20 years old, and minors--those under 20--are legally placed under parental protection. The age for voting in elections and drinking alcohols is stipulated

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by different laws. The government has been studying the feasibility of lowering the legal age of adulthood to 18 years old. Do you support the idea?

Yes 36.4  
No 58.6  
No answer (N/A) 5.0

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes") to the foregoing question) Why? Pick up to three reasons from among those listed below.

They are mentally mature 29.9  
They are well sensible 54.7  
Some support themselves financially 14.9  
They can be aware of adulthood 67.9  
Many countries set adulthood at 18 21.0  
Other answers (O/A) 1.7  
N/A 0.5

Q: (Only for those who answered "no") to the foregoing question) Why? Pick up to three reasons from among those listed below.

They are mentally immature 59.4  
They are not well sensible 49.0  
Many can't support themselves financially 50.5  
They can't be aware of adulthood 49.4  
Adulthood at 18 has taken root in the nation 17.9  
O/A 1.1  
N/A 0.4

Q: Among the legal rights that are currently restricted to those aged 20 and over, what do you think should be permitted to those aged 18 and older? If any, pick as many as you like from among those listed below.

Q: (Only for those who answered "yes") to the foregoing question) Why? Pick up to three reasons from among those listed below.

Voting in elections 46.4  
Drinking alcoholic beverages 16.9  
Smoking 10.6  
Public gambling like horse and bike racing 7.0  
Marriage without parental consent 21.4  
Contract without parental consent 9.6  
None of these rights should be permitted 37.9  
N/A 2.2



Q: Do you think the age coming under the Juvenile Law should be lowered to 18 years old or younger?

Yes 75.5

No 20.5

N/A 4.0

Q: Do you think the age eligible to vote in constitutional referenda should be 18 and older?

Yes 50.1

No 45.2

N/A 4.7

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Polling methodology

Date of survey: Apr. 12-13.

Subjects of survey: 3,000 persons chosen from among all eligible voters throughout the country (at 250 locations on a stratified two-stage random sampling basis).

Method of implementation: Door-to-door visits for face-to-face interviews.

Number of valid respondents: 1,753 persons (58.4 PERCENT ).

SCHIEFFER